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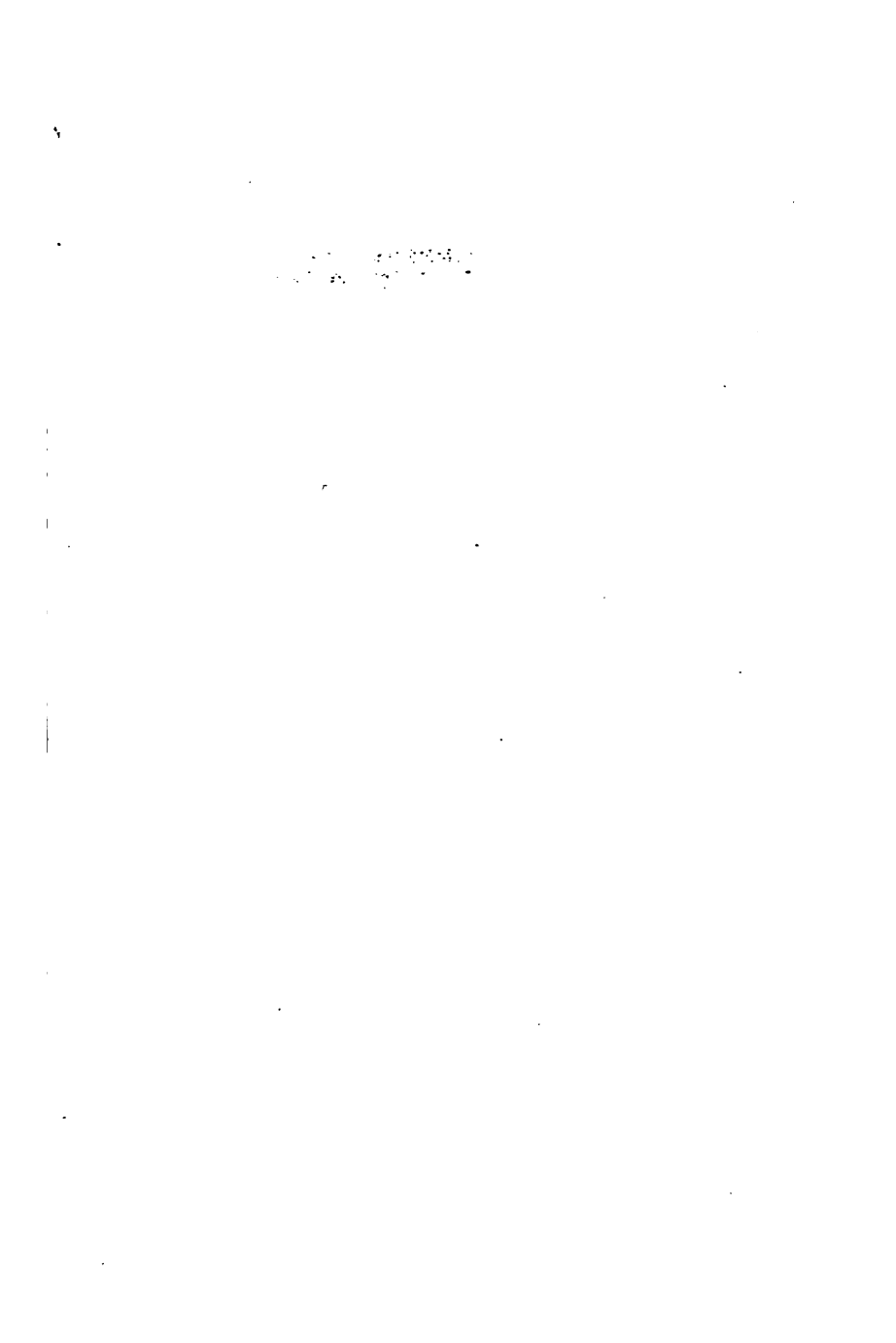
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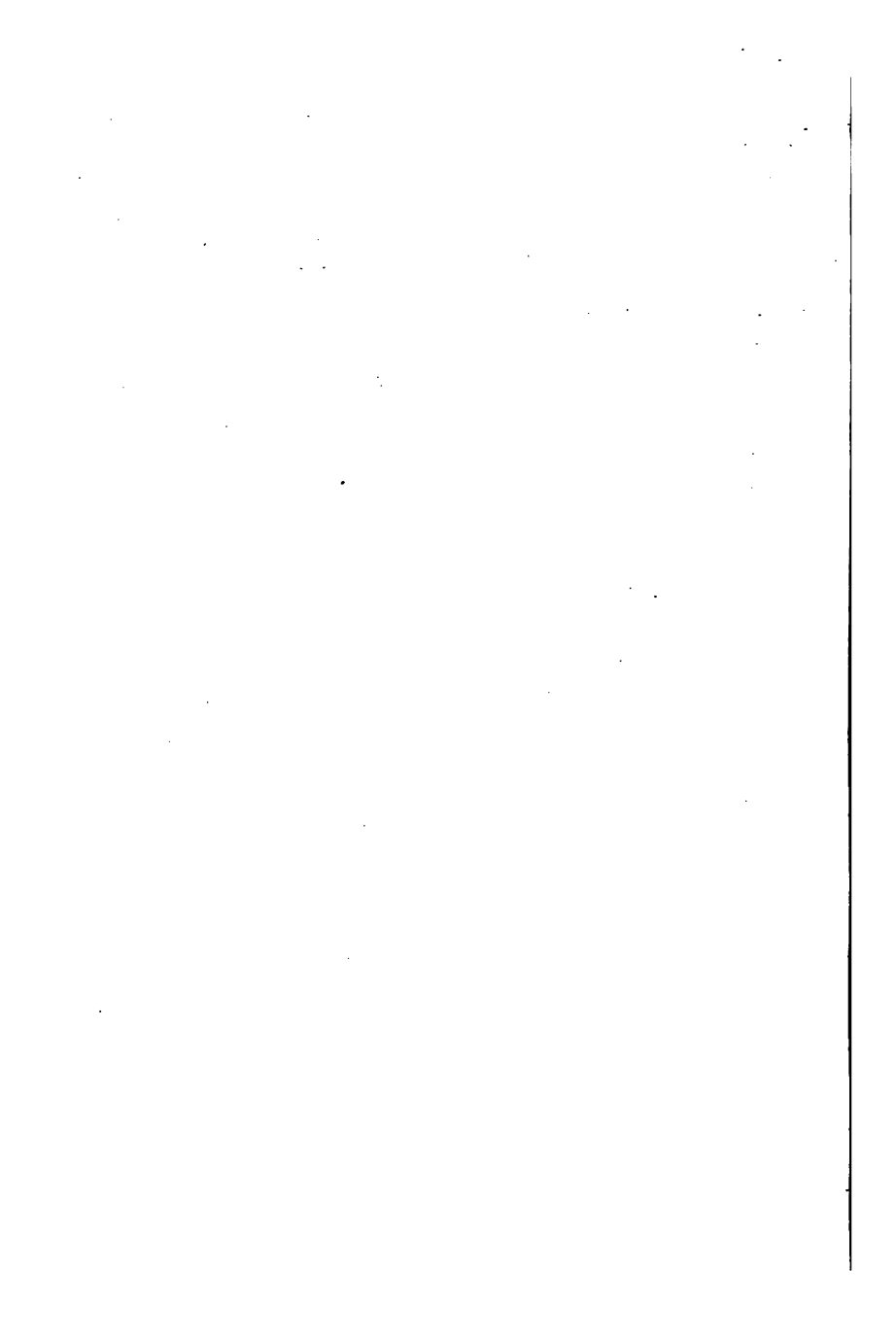
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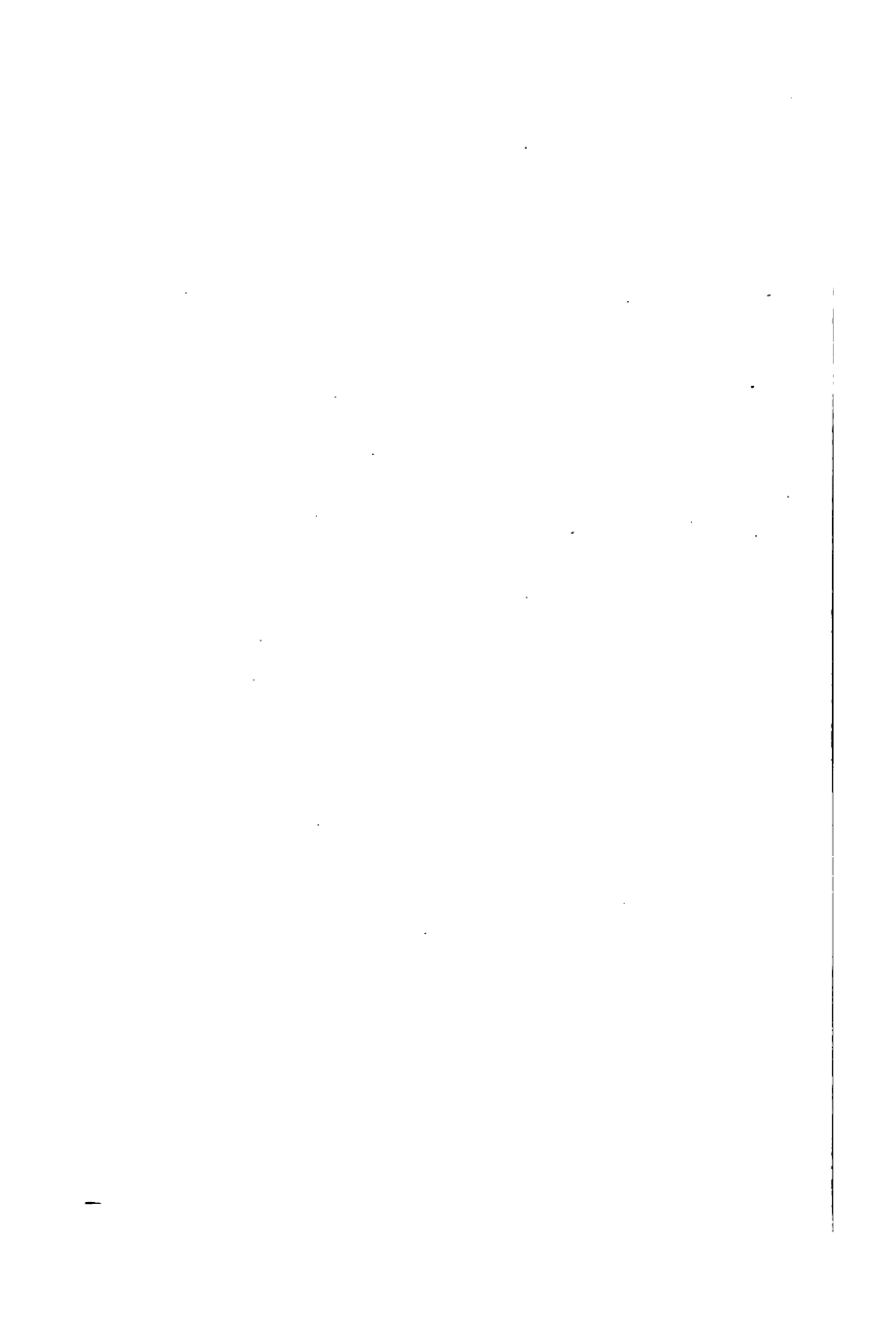
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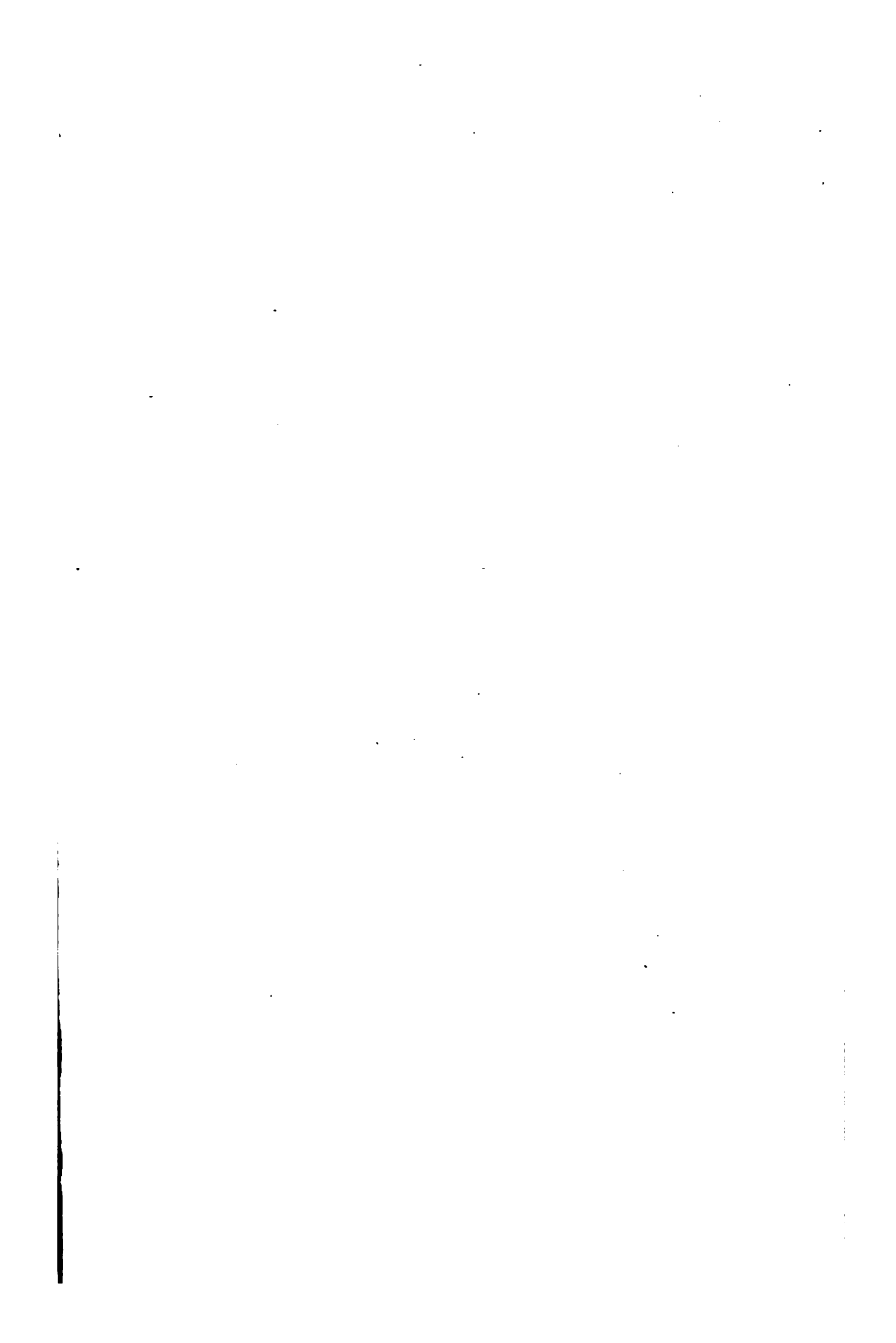
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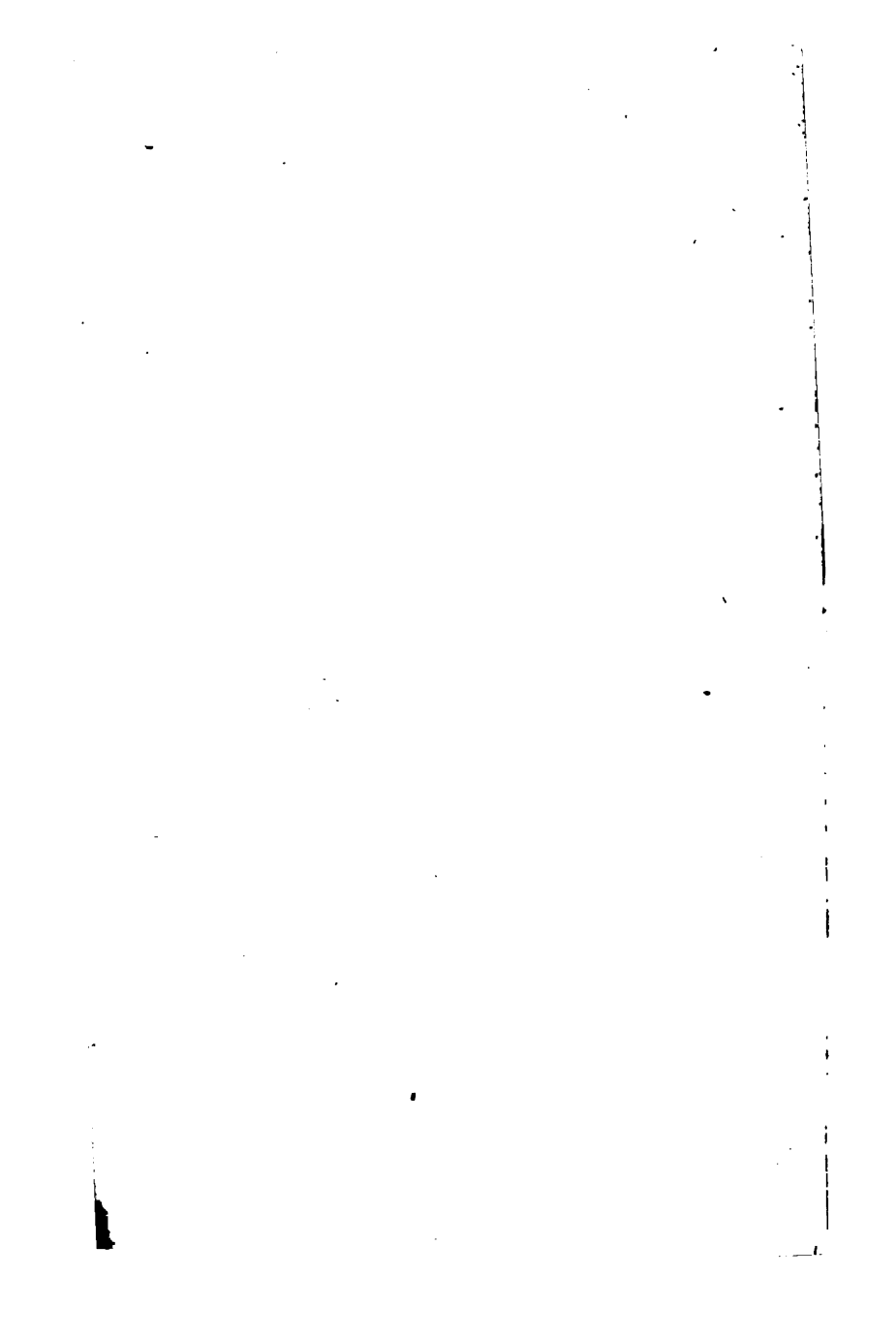




St. Alban's
Abbey







St. Alban's
Abbey

By

The Rev. Edward
Liddell, M.A.

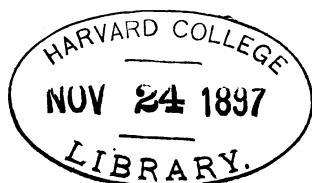
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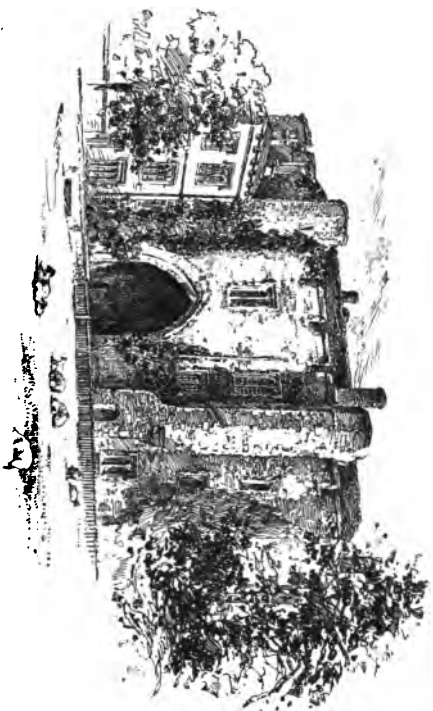
St. Alban's Abbey

SUPPOSE we come by the North-Western, which, though not the shortest route, lands us upon the old road leading over the river Ver and up into the city of St. Albans, the tower of the Abbey, partly hidden by trees, meets our eyes at once. If we go down a green lane to the left we shall come upon the site of Verulam, where the story of the great church begins. Nothing whatever of this city (which in Roman times shared with York the honour of being a *municipium*) is left except a few fragments of its outer walls. From it, in the year 303, was dragged Alban, a Roman

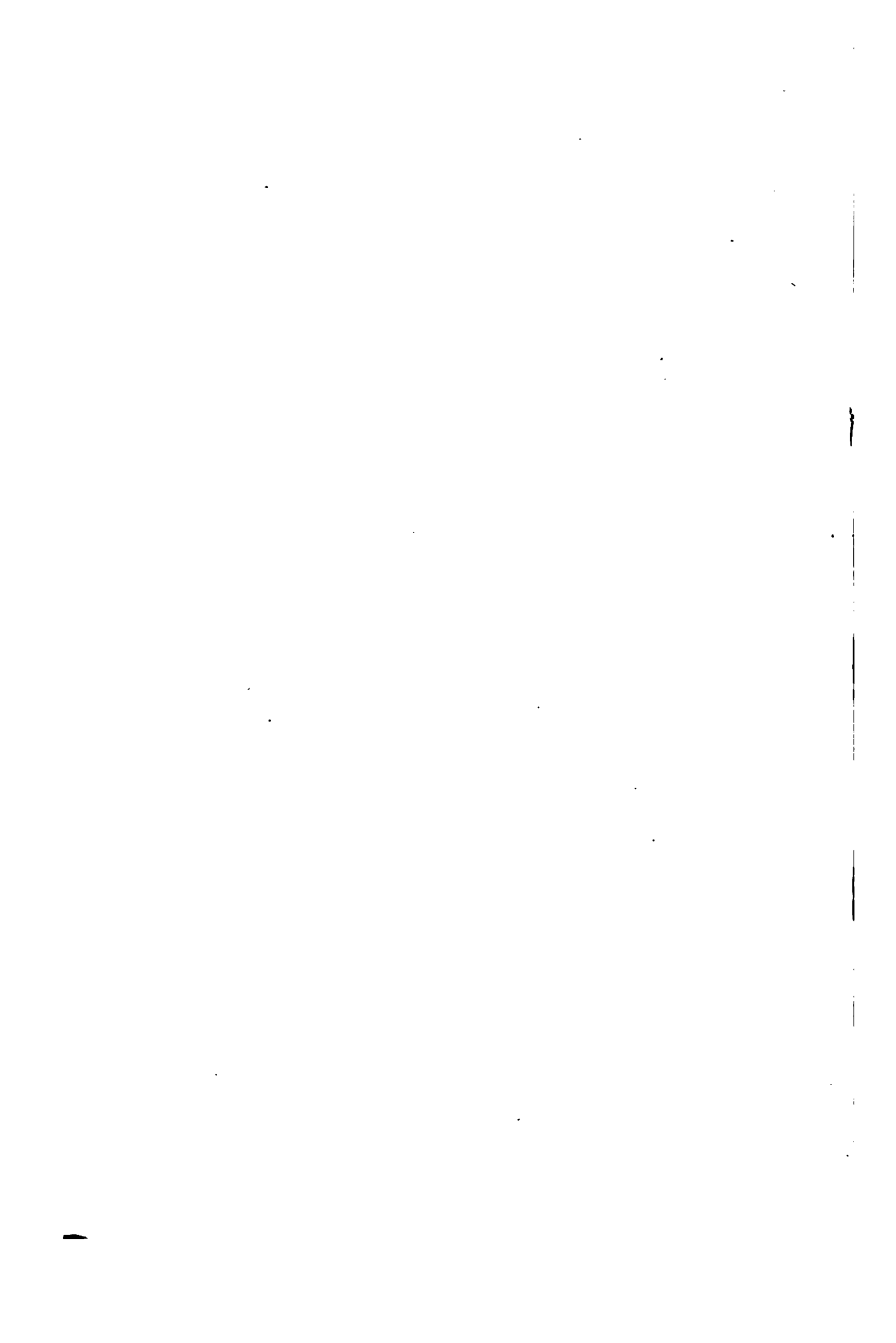
St. Alban's Abbey

civilian, who had given shelter to a Welsh Christian priest, and who had himself confessed the Christian faith. After being scourged, he was taken along the ancient British causeway, which still remains, across the river Ver, and up the lane to the top of the hill afterwards called Holmhurst, where he was put to death. Many centuries later (in 1077) the very bricks of the city followed the martyr to the site of his death, and may now be seen composing the whole of the central tower and the greater part of the nave and transept.

What stories one of these red Roman tiles could tell ! They have witnessed every form of human suffering and human glory. Like the coins which to this day are found in a field called Black Grounds, on the site of Verulam, they speak to us of the days of Claudius and of Nero. They have heard the groans of the seventy thousand people who are said by Dion Cassius to have been slaughtered by Boadicea in A.D. 61, and the



The Great Gateway of the Monastery (now Grammar School)



St. Alban's Abbey

angry shouts of the heathen populace during the reign of Diocletian.

On reaching the top of Abbey Lane, stop for one moment to look at the beautiful gateway, once the grand entrance to the monastery, and successively a place of confinement for refractory monks, a prison in the time of the French war, and a gaol for criminals ; and now appropriated for the use of the St. Albans Grammar School. It is almost the only relic of the conventual buildings that is still left. The rest of the monastery is represented by large irregular mounds covered with grass. After looking at the west end, which has been rebuilt at the expense, and from the designs, of Lord Grimthorpe, we enter the Abbey of St. Albans by the west door, which is open all the year round after 10 A.M.

It is best, if possible, to see the church in the summer, when the heavy curtain, which has to be drawn in winter, is pulled on one side, allowing the eye to travel past the

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screen, on which the organ stands, to the eastern window of the presbytery. The length of the whole building is exceeded only by that of Winchester, while the length of the nave is surpassed by that of no other Gothic church.

As we shall return by the nave again, we will begin by walking towards the east end, and through the glass-door in the south aisle.

But even at the first-glance we are struck by the three, if not four, styles of architecture which meet our eyes. On the left are the round rude arches of the first Norman builder, Paul de Caen, 1077, joined somewhat awkwardly towards the west to the beautiful Early English work of John de Sellâ (or of Studham), 1195, and of W. de Trumpington, 1214. This again joins, on the south side, the Decorated work of Richard Wallingford, 1326, and Michael de Mentmore, 1335, which replaced the ruin caused by the sudden fall of the southern arches in 1323.

It is, I think, Ruskin who has pointed out

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that the difference between the Byzantine architecture, from which the Norman is evidently derived, and the pointed Gothic is a reflection of the difference between Eastern and Western Christianity. The essence of the Eastern faith is repose and quiet, unbroken custom and tradition, and its symbols are the soft rounded arch and the prevailing horizontal lines. The essence of the Western faith is constant growth and endless aspiration, and its spirit is wonderfully reflected in the pointed windows, the soaring arches, and the towering spires of the Gothic builders. Now the worshippers at St. Alban's Cathedral (numbering over two thousand) have the advantage of both these influences.

Are we inclined

“ To strive to wind ourselves too high
For mortal man beneath the sky ” ?

Then we look while we pray at the calming, quieting north side of the nave, with its simple, massive detail, and it says to us, as

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plainly as stones can speak, "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." "Study to be quiet."

Are we inclined to be contented with what we are, and discontented only with what we have? Then we look at the south side, and we hear the echo of the old Jewish rabbi's saying, "The reward of doing one duty is the power to perform another"; or the cry of Longfellow's hero as he climbed the mountain with "Excelsior" on his flag.

Leaving the nave for the present, we make our way eastward beyond the screen, falsely called St. Cuthbert's screen, but really the rood-screen which separated the choir of the monks from the great nave where the public services were held. We are now in a part of the great church which is purely Norman, except for the blocked windows of the triforium, which were filled in by John of Wheathampstead, 1420.

It is at this point that the visitor can trace the whole history, or, as we should say now,

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the evolution of the triforium. The first rude form can be seen just behind the organ as a slab of stone pierced with a cross *pommée* to admit some light to the passage over the roof of the aisle. Then we see the arch enriched with smaller arches and ringed pillars, as in the north and south transepts. Then there are the Early English and Decorated forms, in which, as in all good architecture, a necessary structure is transformed into a thing of beauty.

In the north transept, on its west wall, just under a round-headed window, is a small black cross cut in stone. This marks a traditional site of the martyrdom of St. Alban, when there was neither town nor abbey in this place, but only a flowery slope planted with trees, as described by Bede. Here, within a few years after St. Alban's death in 303, the first church was built. "Ecclesia est mirandi operis et ejus martyris condigna."—*Bede*, i. 7.

A second and probably larger one was

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built by Offa, King of Mercia, in 793, about fifty years after Bede's death. Offa had murdered Ethelbert, King of the East Angles, and, in the hope of expiating his crime, determined to found a monastery in honour of St. Alban. Of Offa's church nothing now remains, unless it be part of the east wall of the transept, in which two rude Saxon windows may be seen bricked up and bedded in the masonry; inside there are ringed Saxon pillars with Norman capitals and bases in the triforium of the north and south transepts. Pillars like these, apparently turned in a lathe, were discovered during the restoration of the two Saxon churches of St. Peter's at Monkwearmouth and St. Paul's at Jarrow-on-Tyne, which were both founded by Benedict Biscop in the seventh century. On the inner side of the arch leading to the north presbytery aisle there is a curious fresco of King Offa.

On the east wall of the north transept there is another fresco. It is intended by



The Abbey from Holywell Bridge

the artist (unknown) to represent the appearance of our Lord to St. Thomas. St. Thomas has his hand placed under our Lord's arm. A scroll issues from the Saviour's mouth bearing the inscription in abbreviated Latin, "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed"; while out of St. Thomas's mouth issue the words, "My Lord and my God."

This formed part of a series of paintings of the History of the Passion and History of the Resurrection, the object of which is explained in a curious description of all the

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altars and tombs in the Abbey, written in the year 1429. It is worth quoting, as it shows how much teaching was conveyed in the Middle Ages, by pictures, symbols, and carvings.

“ For the explanation of the same pictures and mysteries of this altar it is to be noted that like as the truth of the Transfiguration of our Lord Jesus Christ on Mount Tabor was made plain to five witnesses, namely, to three disciples and two prophets, so the salvation of the world, which the Saviour thereof vouchsafed to accomplish in the midst of the earth (that is, in Jerusalem, which is situate in the midst of the habitable world), on the Mount of Calvary, by the testimony of the chief Prophets of His Passion, Jeremiah, namely, and Isaiah, and of the chief and chosen witness of His Resurrection, His disciple Thomas, He willed to set forth in the midst of our church, at the altar placed near the public

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path, where many persons pass by and go out, that the Scriptures and their life-giving testimonies may be the oftener read and seen.

“Now there is in that place two true columns, the shafts whereof denote love to God and one's neighbour, whereby hang all the Law and the Prophets ; one of these, of the colour of the earth, signifies our humiliation according to the passage, ‘Remember that thou art dust and unto dust shalt return,’ and reaches from the base of humility unto its capital with the turret of charity. But the other, red with the blood of our Saviour, besprinkled at His scourging, denotes His victory and honour : its shaft, as above, is extended from the base of virtue unto the capital of the turret of honour.”

On these columns (now destroyed) were inscribed externally the emblems of the

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Passion in the following verses (the original is in Latin) :

“ Bonds, the scourge, the threats, the column, the spitting, and the thorns. Derision, blows, the stripping, lance and nails. The cross with reed and sponge. This (passion) is the cause of praise to the faithful.

“ And lest any one (the record continues) deceitfully attribute to himself the gifts of God alone, in the hands of angels standing together in the said turrets are written these verses :

“ Whatever merit a man has, preventing grace gives.

God crowns nothing in us except His own gifts.

“ There are also two angels sent from the court of heaven to comfort the only begotten Son of God the Father in the agony of His Passion, and to relate to the same

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celestial court His glorious victory, the salvation of men and the restoration of the tenth, the lost order of angels. And in order that the memory of the boundless love of Christ may the more firmly abide in the minds of His worshippers, and that a man may most humbly admit his own wretched state, between the History of the Resurrection and of the Passion it is thus written :

“ Mors tua, mors Christi, fraus mundi, gloria cœli
Et dolor inferi sint memoranda tibi.”

(The word *memoranda* can now be deciphered.)

“ In cruce sum pro te : qui peccas desine pro me :
Desine, condono : pugna, juvo ; vince, corono,”

Which may be thus translated :

“ Thy death, the death of Christ, the deceit of the world, the glory of heaven, and the grief of the under world are to be remembered by thee.

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"I am on the cross for thee : thou who sinnest, cease for my sake.

"Leave off (thy sin), I pardon : fight, I help : conquer, I crown."

"It is to be noted," continues the monk, "that one attains from humility by the column of the love of God and one's neighbour to the turret of charity, and by virtue and uprightness of life one comes to the turret of honour, as John says in his Epistle, 'God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son that we might receive the adoption of sons.'"

The text is a mixture of John iii. 16 with Gal. iv. 5.

One or two interesting points may be noted in the above record of 1429.* One is the mention of a public path. The numerous pilgrims to the Abbey probably approached

* Re-edited, with excellent Notes, by the late Ridgeway Lloyd, in 1873; though we fear the edition is now out of print.

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the shrine by the Wax-house Gate (now an archway leading from the town), where tapers could be obtained for offering at the shrine. Then they must have entered by the north transept door, and would see in front of them the back of the great stalls. These, as we may judge by the places cut to receive them, must have been about twenty feet high, and have effectually prevented the public in either transept from intruding into the presbytery or monks' choir.

Perhaps we cannot do better, as pilgrims of the nineteenth century, than follow this path, even though we are now at liberty to enter where of old no layman, still less woman, might dare to venture. The path leads to the left out of the north transept, in which we have lingered so long, and brings us to the back of Abbot Ramryge's chantry tomb. Both front and back are richly carved, and the inside is elaborately vaulted in stone.

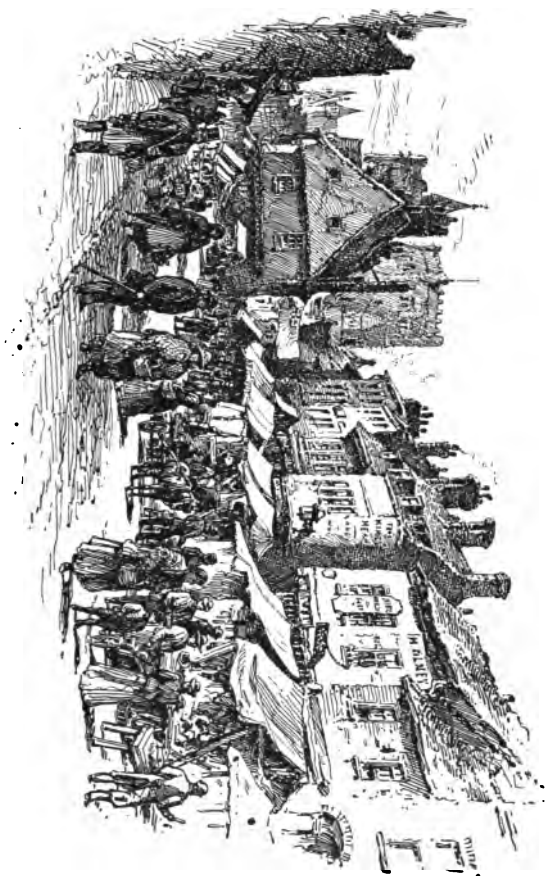
Abbot Ramryge was the last but three of

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the abbots, 1492-1530. Hardly any record of him remains but this tomb, which he probably erected before his death. Carved in clunch, in the small spandrels of the door may be seen the scourging and the execution of St. Alban. In the latter there is a tree to represent the woodland of Holmhurst, a cross in the martyr's hand to show that he was a Christian ; the head is separate from the body by one-sixteenth of an inch, and the eye-ball of the executioner, about the size of a pin's head, is on his cheek, a judgment upon him, according to the old tradition. The symbols of the Passion, as quoted above, are carved in minute detail on one side of the door, and on the other a rebus on Ramryge's name in the shape of two rams' heads and two ryges, or ridges. A similar rebus of a beck (brook) running into a barrel for Bishop Bekington is to be seen at Wells.

Opposite to Abbot Ramryge's tomb (of which his body was dispossessed to make

Cathedral from St. Peter's Street





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room for the body of some one else) is the tomb of Wheathampstead, containing also the magnificent brass of Thomas de la Mare, which for beauty and delicacy of design it would be hard to match anywhere. This memorial was probably executed before his death in 1396, for the blank space left to record the close of his life, &c., has never been engraved. To describe this in detail would be tedious. It must be seen, or perhaps "rubbed," to be appreciated.

But there are curious, unnoted features in the chantry of Wheathampstead, in which, for security's sake, De la Mare's brass is placed.

I. The curious device inside and outside of a beast chewing the vine, a symbol of Satan devouring the Church.

II. The fact that it is in the shape of an arch like that of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, which is on the south side of the Saint's Chapel, behind the great altar-screen.

Abbot John of Wheathampstead was twice

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elected, in 1420 and 1450. Traces of his work can, or rather could, until the recent alterations, be found all over the Abbey. His own symbol is on his tomb in the design of three wheatears, with the motto in Latin, "The valleys shall stand thick with corn," in allusion to his birthplace, which is still famous for its seed-wheat. His abbey-symbol, as appears from an inscription over the arch of the tower, is the lamb and the eagle. You see this in his beautiful ceiling overhead, in a window in the north aisle of the nave, and it was engraved on basins, &c., for the use of the Abbey.

Of the many abbots buried near the high altar the memorial brasses of but two remain. One is that of Anthony de Grey, who is in full armour, with a gentle smile on his brass face. His name-plate, which has been carried off, used to record the fact that he married the fourth "hole sister to our sovraine ladye," namely, Elizabeth Woodville, wife of Edward IV. The other is that of

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Robert Beauner, 1470. His brass reads us a lesson. He was a humble servant of the monastery for forty-three years. He served in the refectory, in the kitchen, and in the infirmary. He died in humble penitence and faith, for this last prayer issues from his mouth, "Cor mundum crea in me, Deus!" (Create in me a clean heart, O God!), and in his hands he holds a heart, from which six tears are dropping, said to indicate his sense of sin.

Before we leave this central part of the Abbey we must look at the ceiling westward of the tower. We find a series of paintings on panels of a date between 1368 and 1376. They were found in 1876, *i.e.*, about five hundred years afterwards, almost by accident, under a very inferior painting, which was removed with great skill and care.

The ceiling contains sixty-six panels, each of which bears a coat-of-arms beautifully emblazoned. They comprise the arms of St. Edmund; of St. Alban; of St. Oswyn,

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King of Northumbria ; of St George, St. Edward of England, and St. Louis of France ; of the emperors of the Romans, the Emperor Constantine, and the King of the Jews. This last design is a crucifix, and represents our Lord at the only time when His rightful earthly title was assigned to Him.

The selection of arms which follows is a peculiar one. They are those of the Kings of Spain, of England, of Portugal, of Sweden, of Cyprus, of the Isle of Man, the shield of Faith (a triple Tau), and the shield of Salvation, representing the instruments of the Passion. These last two form the middle row in the ceiling, and, as Mr. Lloyd remarks, give it a special dignity by having devices that are sacred, instead of heraldic.

The last five rows towards the west are occupied by the arms of the Kings of Aragon, of Jerusalem, of Denmark, of the Dukes of Brittany, of Bohemia, of Lord Thomas of Woodstock (youngest son of

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Edward III.), of the Kings of Sicily, Hungary, and France, of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, of Edward the Black Prince, and of Edmond of Langley (the fifth son of Edward III.). Last come the shields of the King of Norway, of Navarre, and of Scotland. The shields are, therefore, allotted to four classes, namely, saints, European Sovereigns, the divine persons of the Trinity, and to four out of the seven sons of Edward III.

It is to be noted that Russia and Greece are omitted, and also two out of the six sons of Edward III., namely, William of Hatfield, who died an infant, and is buried in the north aisle of the choir of York Minster, and Lionel, Duke of Clarence, who died in 1368. This date, then, marks the beginning of the series of paintings, which were probably executed before 1402.

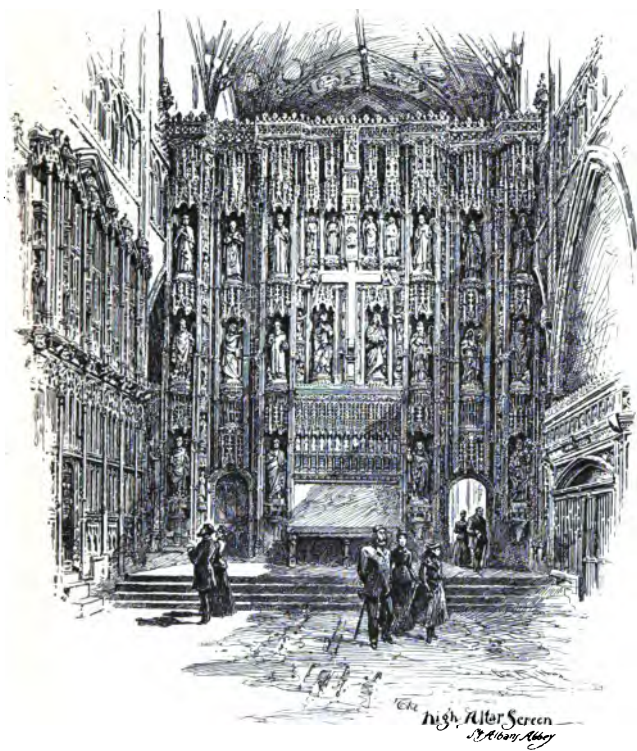
Three of the King's sons are mentioned in the "*Liber de Benefactoribus*" as having contributed gifts to the monastery. Each

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panel, which contains a figure bearing a shield, has also an inscription above the shield, consisting of portions of the *Te Deum*, amounting to twenty-three out of twenty-nine clauses; but in the first two rows the inscriptions are taken from the antiphons in the Sarum and Roman breviaries for Trinity Sunday.

In his interesting and elaborate paper of 1867, Mr. Lloyd happily suggests that "the ceiling was made to re-echo as it were the glorious hymn of praise which the monks were chanting in their stalls below."

From where we now stand we turn to look at the screen of the high altar, which was erected by Abbot William Walyngforde. It is believed to be unique, for neither the screen at Winchester, nor that at All Souls, Oxford, can equal it either in point of size or of grace in design. And though all the figures are modern, and much of the tabernacle work has had to be renewed, yet with such skill and sympathy has the work been





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done (by Mr. Hems, of Exeter), that in its best days the screen can never have looked more beautiful than now. All the statues were destroyed at the time of the Reformation, and as, with the exception of "St. Erasmus," it is not known what these figures were, the restorer, Mr. Hucks Gibbs, now Lord Aldenham, has adopted the plan of illustrating the history of the Church of England from the earliest times, beginning with St. Alban in 303, and ending with St. Richard of Chichester in 1253.

The saints who are or were in the English Calendar are included among the smaller figures. In the centre is the cross, but as yet without the figure of our Lord upon it. Above and below the two arms of the cross are eight angels. On each side are St. Mary and St. John. Below these again are the figures of the twelve apostles, in the centre of whom is our Lord seated in majesty.

The latter, about eighteen inches high, are in white alabaster, and can be identified

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by the symbols which they bear. St. Peter has his keys and book, St. Andrew his cross and book, St. Philip a T-square ; St. James the Less, St. Bartholomew, St. Thomas, and St. Simon bear the instruments of their passion.

Below these again, and forming the reredos, there is to be a group representing the sacred body of the Lord as taken down from the cross, attended by His mother and the two Maries, with soldiers and other figures in the background.

The large figures in the upper row on the right hand are those of the Venerable Bede, of Pope Adrian IV., and of St. Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln.

Bede is in his monk's dress, and holds in his hand his famous ecclesiastical history, to which we owe nearly all our knowledge of English Church history before the eighth century.

Adrian IV., who stands to the left of Bede, is famous as the only Englishman who be-

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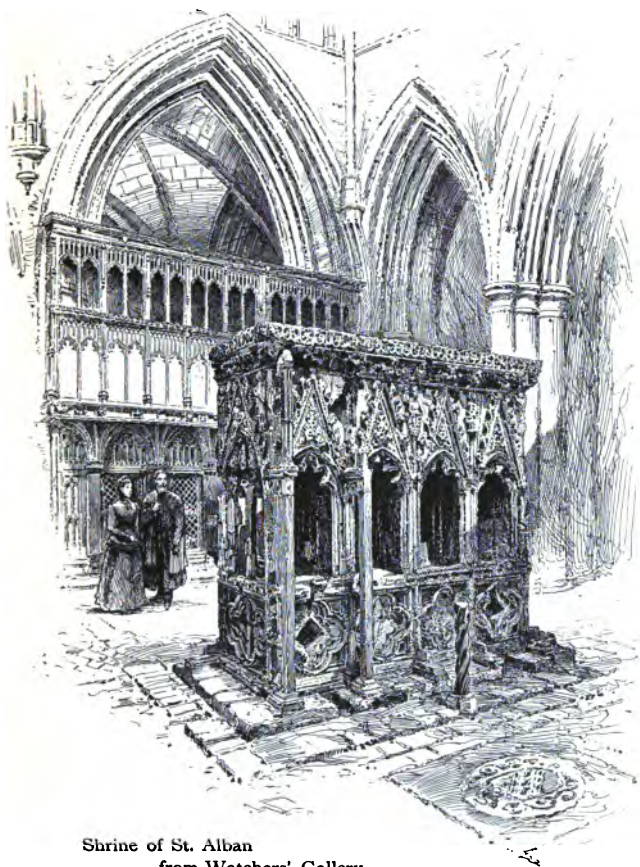
came Pope. His connection with St. Albans is a curious one. His father, already a monk, asked that his son might be admitted to the Abbey. But Nicholas Brakespear, for such was his name, was not considered sufficiently learned by the Abbot of that day. So he went abroad, and by-and-by rose to be first Abbot of St. Rufus, near Valencia, and finally Pope in 1154. It is a curious fact that the family of Brakespear is still represented in St. Albans, and that a farm at King's Langley is still called Brakespear's Farm.

St. Edmund's statue on the upper row has a sceptre in his right hand, and arrows in his left. He was King of East Anglia in 855, and was slain by the Danes in 870. His martyrdom is represented on the north door at Wells, and on a curious mural painting of 1450 at Pickering Church, in Yorkshire.

Leaving the altar screen, through the doorway on the right of the altar, we pass

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into the Saint's Chapel. On the back of the altar screen are statues of St. Stephen, St. Michael, and St. Peter, Virgin and Child, and St. John the Baptist. Here is the shrine of St. Alban. In the sixteenth century it was destroyed and used for building material. But from fragments found bedded in a wall, and put together with great skill and perseverance by Mr. Chapple, it has recently been restored. The shrine is carved in clunch-stone, and was once richly painted and gilt. On the western end can still be seen the martyrdom of St. Alban, on the eastern face, the Transfiguration. Whether or not—and there are grave doubts on the matter—it ever contained the relics of St. Alban, it beautifully suggests the faith of the makers. What a mixture of puerile fable was added to their faith may be seen in the stories told in the "*Gesta Abbatum*." First, how the bones were miraculously found in the wall at Verulam : then how the Danes came and carried them off : how a monk



Shrine of St. Alban
from Watchers' Gallery

St. Alban's Abbey

dreamed a dream : "St. Alban came," he said to the Abbot, "and complained of his resting-place in Denmark, and bade me fetch his relics from thence : " how the monk got leave to go to Denmark, and enter the monastery there with the intention of getting hold of the bones of the saint : how he succeeded in escaping and returning with his precious burden, proved to be the genuine relics by the miracles wrought at the shrine.

No wonder that it was found necessary to keep a watch night and day.

For this purpose the beautiful watch-gallery was erected to the north of the shrine ; it has two storeys, the upper for the monk who watched, and the lower for the relics, where are still a few curiosities—a spur from the battle-field of St. Albans, 1455 or 1461 ; a piece of a hazel wand, with part of a monk's dress which was found in a stone coffin, and a few pieces of Roman pottery.

The martyrdom was here carved in wood, but it has, alas ! been nearly destroyed. In

St. Alban's Abbey

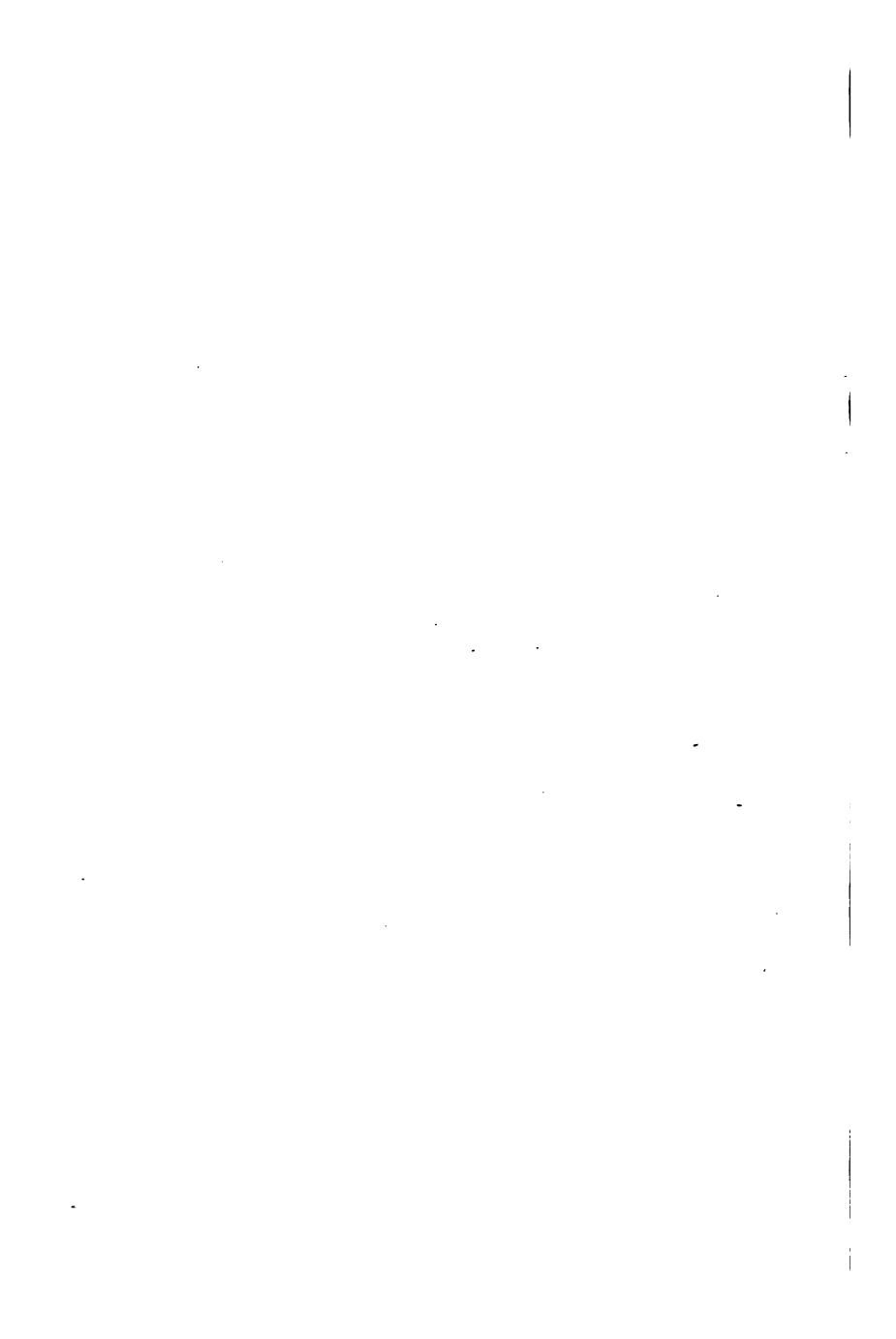
the watch-gallery are numerous figures, some of great force and spirit—a man and a woman seated, with a basket between them heaped up with cakes, a man mowing barley, a stag couchant, a woman milking a cow, a dog holding a boar by the ear, a cat with a rat in her mouth, two men wrestling, and a mare with her foal.

The shrine of St. Amphibalus (now placed on the north of the watch-gallery) has also been reconstructed. Amphibalus is the traditional name of the Welsh cleric who converted St. Alban. His statue on the screen is a noble figure on the right hand of the altar as one looks eastward. His head is tonsured in the Celtic and not in the Roman fashion.

Re-entering the Saint's Chapel, and passing through to the south aisle, we see the very step on which the pilgrims knelt, and the iron grille, coloured blue and gold, through which they gazed at the rich treasures within. The arched tomb is that of Humphrey of



Shrine of St. Amphibalus



St. Alban's Abbey

Gloucester, built by Abbot John Stoke in 1447, probably from designs by Wheathampstead. Close to the step on which you are kneeling is an altar-tomb, marked with five crosses on the top. This slab was, perhaps, part of the altar of St. Cuthbert's Chapel. An early abbot, Richard de Albini, or Exaquiuis, *i.e.*, Essay in Normandy, believing himself cured by touching a relic of St. Cuthbert, built a chapel for the Hostry, and called it St. Cuthbert's, conveying the slab, which is of Frosterley marble, from Stanhope, in the county of Durham. We can hardly imagine the difficulty of conveying such a mass of stone in the days when there were no railways and no roads save the remains of the old Roman highways.

The Lady Chapel we now enter through the glass door. The part on which we first stand was built by Roger de Norton in 1260-1290; part by John of Berkhamstede, who was buried about 1301 opposite the high altar, where, in old French, he promises forty

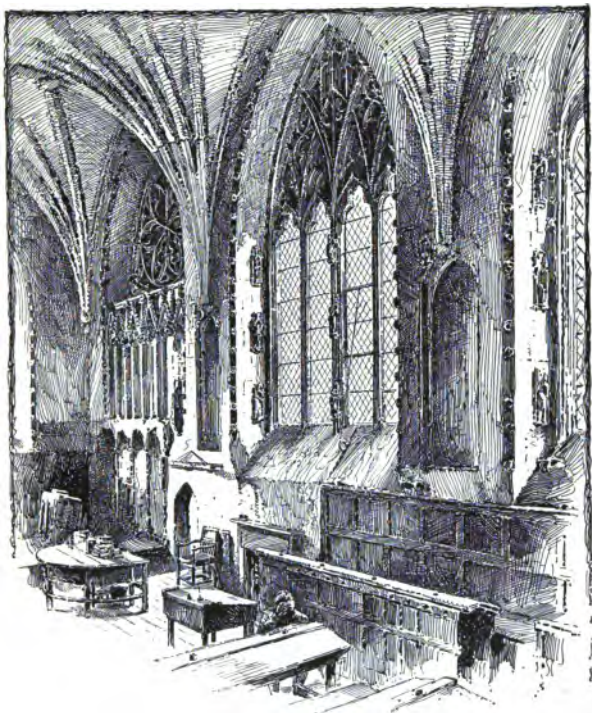
St. Alban's Abbey

years and forty days of pardon to any one who will pray for his soul ; and part by John de Marinis about 1302-1308.

After the dissolution of the monastery the townspeople broke a hole in the north and south walls, and so made a public footpath, which remained in use till a few years ago.

By a charter of Edward VI., of 12th May, 1553, this chapel was granted to the mayor and burgesses for the use of the Grammar School.

Not only has the footpath been stopped and the Grammar School removed, but the chapel has been beautifully restored by Lord Grimthorpe. The vaulted roof, of the time of Eversdon, 1308-1326, once only in imitation of stone, is now of real stone. The enrichments of the chapel—carvings of flowers and fruits—include nearly all the well-known species in the neighbourhood. Buttercups, daisies, brambles, whitethorn, holly, lime, ivy, convolvulus, beech, each finds its place on capital, boss, cusp, or label. Two bosses



The Grammar School in the Lady Chapel



St. Alban's Abbey

are adorned with orchids, the *Odontoglossum* *Mandelli* and *Cattleya vexillaria*, perhaps in allusion to Mr. Sanders's famous orchid nursery. Towards the east end, some of the flowers and fruits are symbolical. The wheat, the vine, the olive, the passion-flower, the apple, and the lily have a lesson to convey. Nature, it is suggested, is a book of parables, of which Jesus Christ turned over the first few leaves in order to encourage us to continue the study.

In the ante-chapel we are again on the track of the pilgrims, as we may know from the number of shrines grouped in that part before the Reformation. It is a curious fact that in the monks' choir there were no altars save the high altar ; whereas, in the path of the pilgrims above mentioned, they were to be met at every turn ; possibly because the monks considered them as more adapted for gain than for godliness. To the ladies of Hertfordshire, through Sir Gilbert Scott, is due the restoration of the windows of the

St. Alban's Abbey

Lady Chapel, in exact accordance with the old tracery.

At the south-east end of the chapel a door leads into the Chapel of the Transfiguration, now adapted as a vestry.

Let us retrace our steps by the south aisle of the Presbytery. At the east end of it was the altar of St. Mary of the Four Tapers; in the corresponding place on the north side was St. Michael's altar, and in the western end of the ante-chapel were the altars of St. Edmund, St. "Amphibalus," and St. Peter. In a record of 1428 it is said that the people flocked to these shrines with great devotion on the days of their respective saints. At the south side of the tomb of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, we see how covered it is with figures, which are said to be kings of Mercia. On the left are the remains of a stairway leading to the Treasury, which no longer exists.

In the south transept the north side once contained two chapels, one dedicated to SS. Mary and Blaise (after the building of the

St. Alban's Abbey

Lady Chapel this was transferred to St. John) and the other devoted to St. Stephen. The window of the watching-chamber can still be seen. On the south side is a recess containing three cupboards of about the time of Charles II., which are still used for their original purpose. On Saturday night they are filled with loaves, which on Sunday afternoon are given to certain widows.

The doorway out of the south transept and the beautiful arcading above it are worthy of attention. About a third of it was found in taking down a brick wall in the "slype," or porch, south of the south transept. No one seems to know the derivation of the word "slype," but it is found in the old chronicles, and a similar structure is so called at Canterbury, Norwich, Peterborough, Winchester and Gloucester. At St. Albans it led in old days to the monks' cemetery, and perhaps to the sumpter's yard, through which supplies were brought to the monastery :



Doorway, South Transept

and it had a door leading into the great cloister.

It now contains a number of fragments, discovered at various times, which serve to show the wonderful richness of ornament in the Abbey before 1535. On the arcading may be seen an enrichment begun but never

St. Alban's Abbey

finished. These last words apply to all mediæval architecture. It was begun and completed, but never perfected. There was always some improvement to be made, some beautiful feature to be added.

Such a feature is much needed in the choir, of which only the western return stalls, erected by Bishop Claughton, are worthy of the place they occupy. The north aisle has recently been converted into a vestry. The old Abbey doors, and the Charles II. pulpit, and the picture of the "Last Supper," with, it is said, Dean Kennett the guise of Judas, will well repay the examination of the visitor.

As we pass again into the nave through the glass door, we see on our left the joint tomb of two servants, Roger and Sigar, of whose manner of life there are long accounts in the "Gesta" of the Abbots, as also of the visions and austerities of a disciple named Christina, who frightened the abbot of that day by her supernatural knowledge of his

St. Alban's Abbey

misdoings. Here, also, are traces of eighteenth century art, in the form of two marble monuments. On one of these, marble cherubs are wiping marble tears with marble pocket-handkerchiefs. He or she for whom they weep shall be nameless.

The remains of frescoes discovered by Dr. Nicholson, a former learned Rector of St. Albans, are too interesting to be unnoticed. They consist of six crucifixions on the western side of the Norman piers, with paintings under them. The most curious of these is that on the fourth nave pier from the west. Here is a crowned figure of our Lord upon a cross coloured green, with lopped boughs, St. Mary on the spectator's left and St. John on the right, while beneath is a representation of the Annunciation, and beneath that again a bracket, on which once stood a figure of St. Richard of Chichester. The Latin name for Richard is Ricardus, which has been made to indicate the saint's

St. Alban's Abbey

character in the "Acta Sanctorum," thus :
" ' Ri ' signifies 'ridens,' smiling ; ' car ' signifies 'carus,' dear ; ' dus ' is short for ' dulcis,' sweet !

" Nominis in primo rides, dulcescis in imo,
Si medium quæris, dulcis amicus eris."

The four frescoes facing south are those of the "Thré Wise Men" (?) ; of St. Osyth, of St. Thomas of Canterbury, and of St. Christopher.

The first of these has the remains of an inscription in black letter, which bids us pray for the soul of "Willelme jadis bal e johanne sa femme." The painting above is variously interpreted. Both the figures are meant to be those of males, as their drapery only extends to the ankles. The head of the left figure has a vandyked crown, while a third, who is apparently bald, is just visible. The black letters refer to Mr. W. Tod, who was bailiff of the town in 1421. This design is on the seventh pier from the west.

St. Alban's Abbey

On the sixth is a large figure supposed to be that of St. Osyth, who is said to have carried her own head after it was cut off by the Danes, in the seventh century. Her altar was in the north transept, her statue is on the altar screen.

On the fifth pier from the west is St. Thomas à Becket, as an archbishop, wearing alb, dalmatic, chasuble, maniple, gloves, and shoes, with a cross-staff in his hand, and blessing with three uplifted fingers. In the Cotton MS. at the British Museum there is a record of the painting of this figure during the abbacy of Thomas de la Mare, 1349—96. The fresco of St. Christopher may be recognised by the figure of the infant Saviour in his arms, as recorded in the famous legend. It was a lucky thing to look on the face of St. Christopher. As an old Latin distich, under the earliest woodcut known, informs us,

“On the day you look at the face of Christopher,
on that day you will assuredly not die an evil death.”

St. Alban's Abbey

The slight sketch here given by no means exhausts the interest of the cathedral church, for if the Queen of Sheba came to life and read this account, and were then to pay a visit to the Abbey of St. Albans, she would say once more, as she said of the glory of Solomon, that "the half had not been told her."



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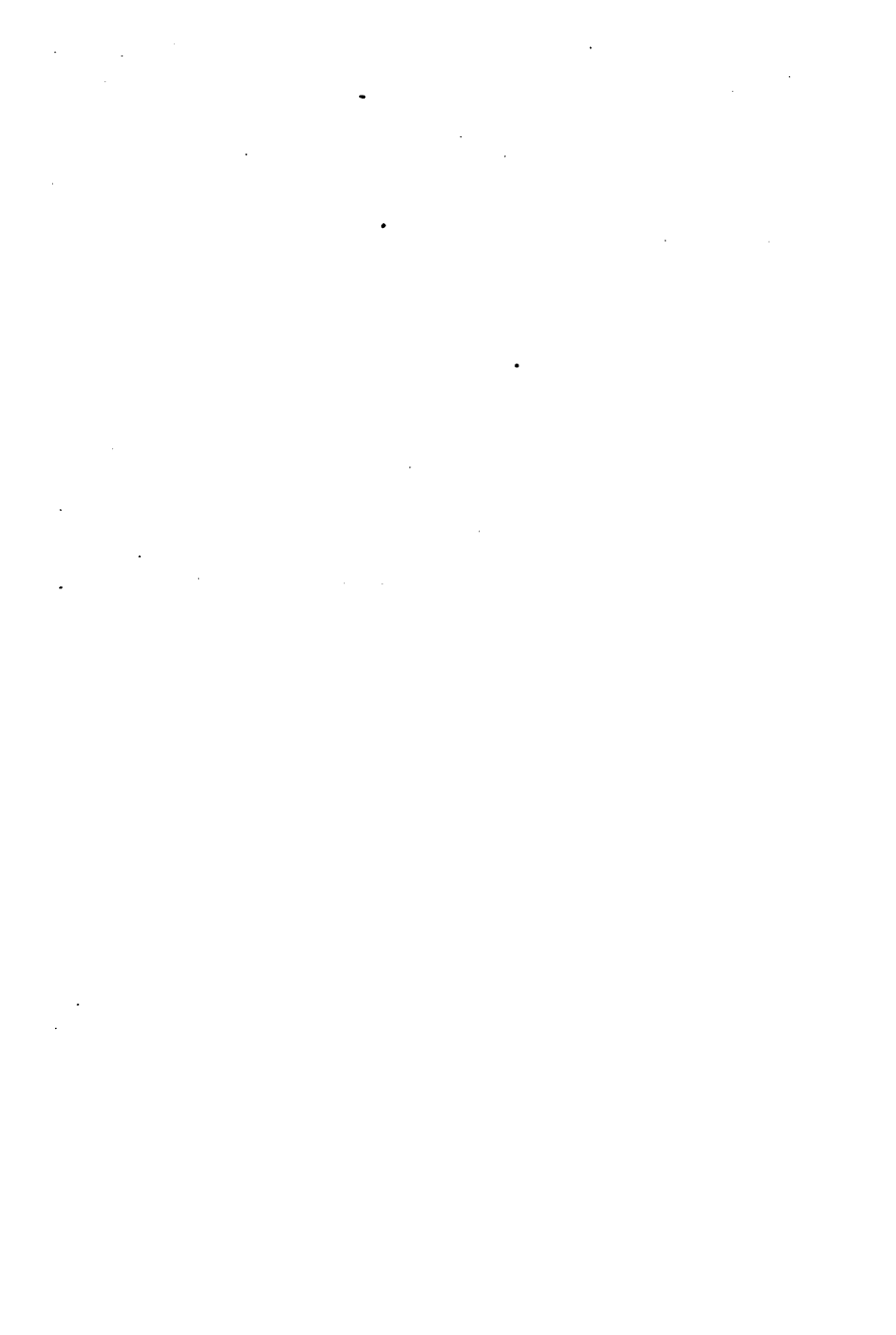
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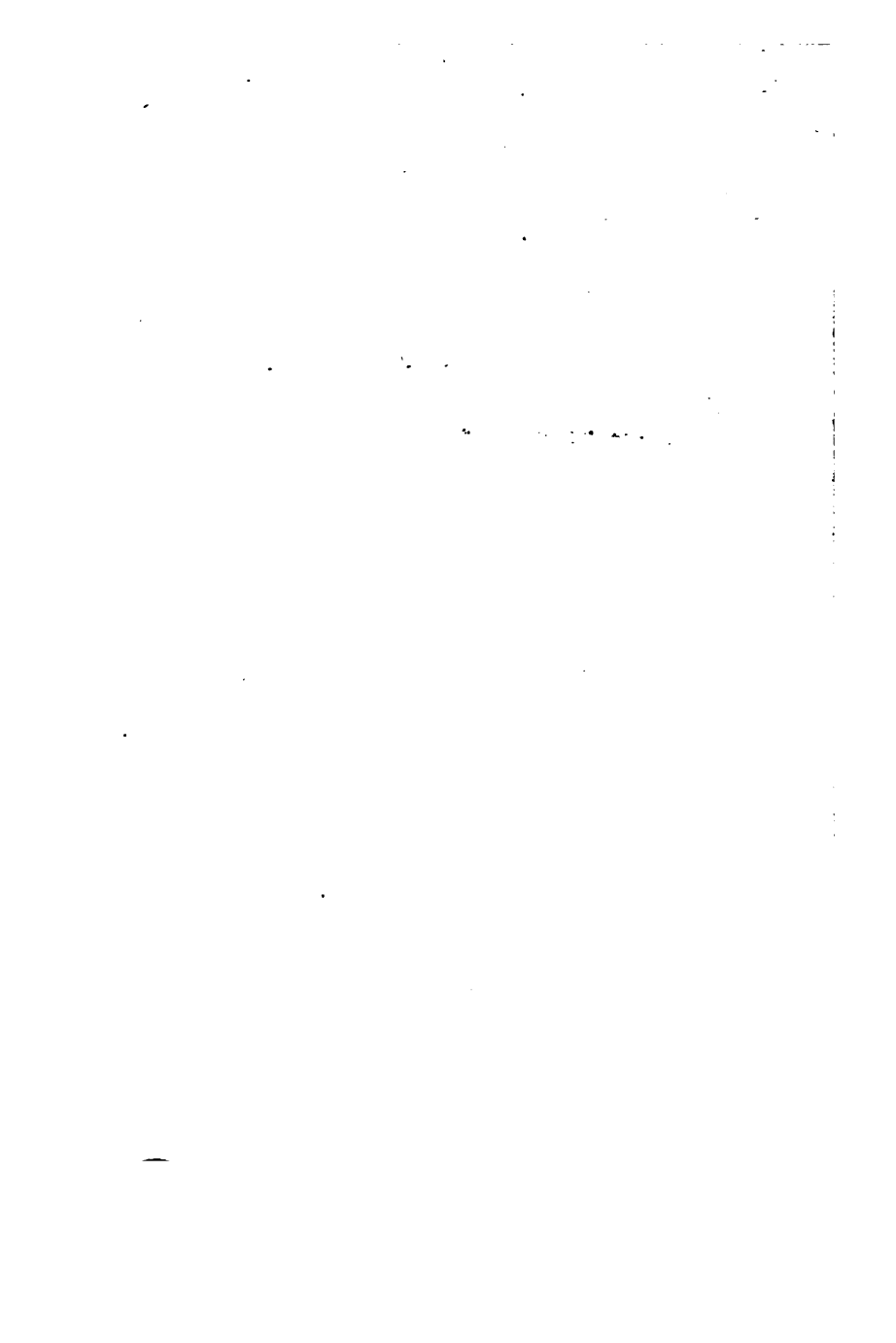
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